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THE JOHN WANAMAKER COMMERCIAL INSTITUTE— A STORE SCHOOL

BY JOHN WANAMAKER,
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The application to the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia during the month of September just past for a charter for the "*American University of Applied Commerce and Trade*"—the first of its sort—has brought, perhaps rather importantly, before the public eye an educational system that, for as many as twelve years, has been in active operation in a very quiet way under the title of "The John Wanamaker Commercial Institute." A "Store-School" it is commonly called by those who know it, for it is an organization inside the Wanamaker store in Philadelphia to enable those who are doing the day's work and earning a living to get a better education to earn a better living.

It is the first actual "school of practice" of business methods, giving daily opportunities to obtain a working education in the arts and sciences of commerce and trade. When a young man graduates from it he receives a degree which is in effect a combination of what Harvard College calls the degree of "Master of Business Administration," with a certificate of a certain number of years' actual experience in the business world. His career and the development of his earning capacity have not had to wait until his college course ended—the two have marched along shoulder to shoulder, study assisting labor, and labor in turn illuminating and illustrating book knowledge. The two together daily increase his value to his employer and to himself.

The idea of the commercial institute (now developing into the American University of Applied Commerce and Trade) came long ago to the writer with a realization of the full and sacred obligations of employer and employee. The payment of an agreed wage from one to the other, the taking in exchange specified hours of labor and the continuation of this mechanical system through weeks and months and years, define neither an employer's relation to his people nor the duty of the workers to one who happens to control their output of energy and brains.

Every man who studies along the fine and broad lines of commercial enterprise to-day must recognize the fact that a business career is a profession as noble in its way as that of the lawyer or the engineer. Men and women must be trained for it. They must become specialists. The little boy who comes into a store forced by the driving necessity to begin the task of earning a livelihood must not, for the honor of the profession, be allowed to drift along undisciplined and unlessoned in the science of his work. He must not for his own sake be permitted to stand dead to development, content to live on the small stock of educational provisions that he laid in before his working days commenced.

From some such threads of thought as these sprang the idea of "The John Wanamaker Commercial Institute." It has never been a part of the business made public, and yet it has been the pivot about which the organization of the store staff swings, for it largely determines the positions of the younger people, their wages and their advancement. High standing in the school's records means certain promotion in the section of the store work to which a student is assigned; habitual low marks, indicating a lack of interest or a lack of capacity without improvement, result in a change of names on the payroll. To-day about 7,500 graduates of this commercial institute are showing the mercantile world what new kind of business men and women may be produced by this store-school.

Of necessity the time given to recitations in the school-room is limited. It is "little and often and continuous" that counts, as the horse said every time he put down a foot. The smaller boys and girls of the store have their separate school sessions in the morning and reach their posts of duty in the business proper by ten o'clock. Each pupil has two such sessions a week besides the hours for drill and special training. Three hundred older boys have two regular evenings of school each week, after a hot supper in the store dining rooms at the close of the business day. The faculty of the institute consists of twenty-four teachers, some of whom are instructors in the daily schools of Philadelphia, and in the curriculum you will find classes in reading, writing, arithmetic, English, spelling, stenography, commercial geography, commercial law and business methods.

A very important development of the school life among the boys is a military battalion of six companies, officered by the boys

themselves. This military phase of the school is the garden where grow the lessons of discipline, organization, precision and obedience, and the health lessons of muscular training that give bodily strength without which successful mental work is impossible. A military band of seventy-five pieces and a drum and bugle corps of forty are outgrowths of the organization, and happy summer vacation times are spent by the little soldiers tenting in squads on a campground of five acres at Island Heights, New Jersey, with headquarters at "The Barracks," by the sea.

The girls of the store also have their military drills and their own drum and bugle corps, while their military band is developing. All are trained in singing, and there are many incidental interests, such as the orchestra, to which thirty students belong, the mandolin club, glee club, savings fund, etc. For those who wish to become proficient in foreign languages there are classes in French and German. Attendance at these classes is required of such of our people as need to go abroad in the course of their business dealings, but is voluntary with others who are aiming to fit themselves for these positions.

Progress in the institute goes on by regular system. The little boys of the morning school pass by promotion into the older corps and the evening school. The girls' classes, always separate, are graded from lowest to highest. Boys and girls graduate in due process, receiving a diploma that is highly prized as an evidence of experience, attainment and good standing in the esteem and respect of the store management. They are then full-fledged members of the staff of the particular section of the store in which they are employed—no longer "boys and girls," but "men and women" of the store, trained and fitted into some well-defined division of the activities of this great commercial house. Their future is circumscribed only by their personal limitations, for it is a great fixed policy of the house to build up from the ranks, and the boys and girls of to-day will be the chiefs of to-morrow.

Twelve years have not been long enough to perfect this system of business education, which has made notable improvements in the methods of work, in the character, outlook and ethics of the personnel of the store. Unintelligent and wasteful labor has lessened. The wisdom of co-operation and mutual helpfulness has been recognized. Knowledge of merchandise, its production, distribution and

uses has been increased. Principles of control and government and organization have developed.

I may be permitted to say here that my confidence and firm belief in the value of the commercial institute and its relation and application to the laws of the business has led me to build it into the new Philadelphia store building in stone and iron and cement. Yes—there will be special classrooms, a library and reading room, a gymnasium and swimming pool for the use of the students. But that, as Kipling says, is another story.